

THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

Public Information Department, 11150 East Blvd., Cleveland, Ohio 44106; 216/421-7340

PRESS RELEASE

June 6, 1990

Contact: Denise Horstman
 Cynthia S. Hanson

ART MUSEUM PRESENTS MAJOR PHOTOGRAPHY RETROSPECTIVE June 27 - August 19, 1990

A landmark exhibition at The Cleveland Museum of Art takes a new look at the history of photography. **Photography Until Now**, which opened at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, will be on view at the Museum--its only other venue--from June 27 through August 19, 1990. The exhibition is a rare opportunity to see the range of photographic work since 1839, when L.J.M. Daguerre, the first of photography's inventors to make his work known to the world, announced the process he had invented. **Photography Until Now** offers the directness and immediacy of daguerreotype portraits, the painterly quality of Edward Steichen's pictorialist photographs, the mammoth scale of pictures documenting famous sites from the ancient world to the American West, and the glimpses of photography in such contemporary art as Robert Rauschenberg's mixed-media work.

Photography Until Now presents 275 photographs drawn from major public and private collections as well as lesser known institutions in the U.S. and abroad. Tom Hinson, curator of contemporary art at Cleveland, believes the show stands out among the other inclusive retrospectives inspired by the anniversary:

This exhibition isn't the product of a meeting of several curators' minds, but a unique selection by John Szarkowski of The Museum of Modern Art, whose expertise is virtually unmatched internationally, who has a very sure grasp of what he sees as photography's history. His premise is fresh: that photographs have never been made "in a vacuum," that over a century and a half the art and technology of photography and its place in culture are all intertwined and mustn't be isolated in history books or photography shows. As a result of his decades of work in this field, this exhibition offers a surprising number of anonymous works and little-known pictures by acknowledged masters.

photography until now/the cleveland museum of art-2

Cleveland Museum director Evan H. Turner says, "We are delighted at our great good luck to be presenting this exhibition of stunningly beautiful works which, quite aside from the remarkably high quality of the objects, really has something significantly original to say about photography."

The story begins in photography's prehistory, when even the many people vying to be its first successful inventor were hard pressed to imagine what purposes it might serve. The two dominant early methods, daguerreotypes and calotypes, were in use from about 1839 until the mid-1850s. Daguerreotypes--unique, irreproducible pictures on metal plates--were usually portraits of uncelebrated sitters made for their families' use. Calotypes, paper negatives from which multiple prints could be made, enabled photography to serve larger cultural and national aims. Such prints constitute the most remarkable body of work in photography's first decade--the cityscapes, genre scenes, architectural studies, and portraits of clerics, intellectuals, and artists by the Scottish team of painter David Octavius Hill and chemist Robert Adamson. Many of the most impressive photographs of the 1850s--which even today are some of the greatest photographs ever made--come from Gustave Le Gray, Charles Nègre, Henri Le Secq, and other French calotypists.

The wet-plate (or collodion) method, used from about 1855 to 1880, combined the daguerreotype's virtue of striking clarity with the calotype's potential for multiple prints, but was a slow, deliberate process which inevitably led to the professionalization of photography. That its prints were often huge and captured intricate details made it ideal for recording sites and monuments, the aftermath of battle, or likenesses of public figures. Among such works in the show are wet-plate pictures made by Roger Fenton in England (Salisbury Cathedral: The Spire, ca. 1860, and others), Charles Marville in France (Paris street scenes, ca. 1865-70), and Timothy O'Sullivan and others in the United States who sharpened their skills during the Civil War and

photography until now/the cleveland museum of art-3

made memorable photographs of the West in the 1860s and 1870s, as American photography came of age.

Photography was transformed by technological developments in the 1880s. Gelatin or dry emulsion processes, which freed the photographer from hauling his darkroom and equipment to his subject, together with commercial genius exemplified by George Eastman's hand-held cameras, engendered simple new methods for creating spontaneous, stop-action pictures. The art and craft of basic picture-taking was suddenly within everyone's reach. The halftone screen invented in the 1880s made it possible to recreate photography's graduated gray tones on a printing press using tiny dots of ink. The resulting companionability of text and pictures in newspaper illustrations and advertisements, picture magazines, and books of photography had, by the early twentieth century, brought photographers into a complex publishing system.

Celebrity portraits and fashion pictures that were at home in such popular publications as Life are represented by outstanding selections by Adolf de Meyer (Helen Lee Worthing, 1920) and Irving Penn (Large Sleeve (Sunny Harnett), New York, 1951). Political persuasion was the purpose of photomontages that avant-garde Russian painter and socialist Alexander Rodchenko made in the 1920s in Russia and Dorothea Lange's pictures of migrant workers in the United States commissioned by the Farm Security Administration in the 1930s and early 1940s. Photographers' concern for the integrity of their work, combined with the decline of picture magazines and the rise of television in the 1960s, led such photographers as Penn, Robert Frank, and Garry Winogrand to adapt the styles of fashion or photojournalism for personal expression in their photographs.

The explosion of photography education in the 1960s and 1970s reinforced this new, resolutely artistic perspective. Galleries showing photographs as personal and individual art rapidly became more numerous and more widely noticed. Color

photography until now/the cleveland museum of art-4 photography processes, perfected largely for amateur snapshot fans, became important media for many artists. Photographers also explored modernist concerns, including fictionalized self-portraits and staged scenes or studio tableaux, and enlisted photography to document conceptual works of many kinds, broadening its presence in contemporary art. The exhibition concludes with pieces made in the 1980s by Tina Barney, Lee Friedlander, David Hockney, Chris Killip, Judith Joy Ross, Lucas Samaras, Cindy Sherman, and William Wegman, among others.

John Szarkowski succeeded eminent photography historian Beaumont Newhall as director of the Department of Photography at The Museum of Modern Art in 1962. Since that time, his department has presented more than one hundred exhibitions and been responsible for the continued development of MoMA's collection of more than 20,000 photographic prints dating from about 1840 to the present. **Photography Until Now** is MoMA's first loan exhibition to survey photography's history since the centenary presentation **Photography: 1839-1937** more than fifty years ago. In his introduction to the accompanying catalogue, Mr. Szarkowski quotes the painter Renoir: "Paint in tubes, being easy to carry, allowed us to work from nature....without paints in tubes there would have been no Cézanne, no Monet, no Sisley or Pissarro, nothing of what the journalists were later to call Impressionism"--and makes an analogy with photography. Just as Impressionism was not the invention of paint in tubes, but rather that a broadly felt desire to paint the ephemeral landscape may have helped create the demand for ready-to-use paints, so the reciprocal mix of artistic ends and means (like an internal combustion engine or a mathematical equation, he says) struck him as useful in approaching the history of photography, "to bring together in one simple, coherent story the thousand, endlessly complicated plots that are the story's component parts."

photography until now/the cleveland museum of art-5

Photography Until Now is also the title of the catalogue, which is available in the Museum Bookstore in hardcover for \$60.00 (\$51.00 for members) and paperback for \$29.95 (\$25.50 for members).

The exhibition is supported by a generous grant from Springs Industries, Inc., and is part of the Springs of Achievement Series on the Art of Photography at The Museum of Modern Art, New York. The Cleveland showing is supported by a gift from Mr. and Mrs. Thomas A. Mann and a grant from the Ohio Arts Council.

Releases for two supporting exhibitions, the Museum's summer Wednesday Evening Festivals, and numerous free public programs are included in this press packet. Admission to the exhibitions and to all programs (except the outdoor suppers on Wednesday evenings) is free.

Photography Until Now is the third of three major photography exhibitions mounted at the Cleveland Museum to celebrate photography's sesquicentennial--the first two were **Cervin Robinson: Cleveland, Ohio**, and **Bourke-White: A Retrospective**.

#

For more information, photographs, or slides, please contact Denise Horstman, Public Information Office, The Cleveland Museum of Art, 11150 East Boulevard, Cleveland OH 44106; 216/421-7340.